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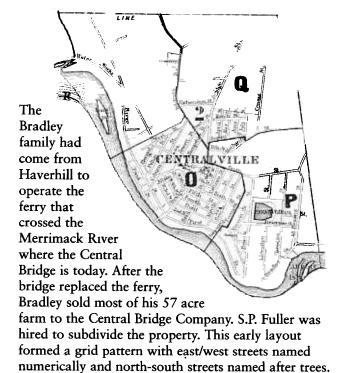
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A History of Centralville

entralville was developed in the year 1831 and was the largest of two sub-divisions in Lowell. It was originally part of the Bradley farm in Dracut. Part of Centralville was first annexed to Lowell in 1851, with the remaining section of the neighborhood annexed in 1872 to form the present day Centralville.

Centralville Historical Map



the bridge and annexation occurred. After that, Centralville grew far more dramatically
Other areas of present day Centralville were developed later. Most of Christian Hill was subdivided during the late 1860s. This land was originally part of the Charles Swan Estate. By the 20th Century, most of the present day homes were constructed.

Development was slow until the toll was abolished on

Centralville has always been primarily a residential neighborhood. However, by 1870, a small commercial area on Bridge Street had evolved. Businesses included three grocery stores, a meat shop, a clothing store and several variety stores. There were also several industrial uses such as a blacksmith, carriage maker, wire goods manufacturer, shuttle maker and moth powder maker. Other industries were a mauve ink manufacturer and a beer extracting company.

Historically, the people of Centralville were Polish and French Canadians with Portuguese also settling in Centralville during the early 20th Century.

In 1936, the Merrimack River flooded much of lower Centralville. In many cases, the water crested at the second floor of the buildings.



The historic 401 Bridge Street which is located at the corner of Third Street and Bridge Street.

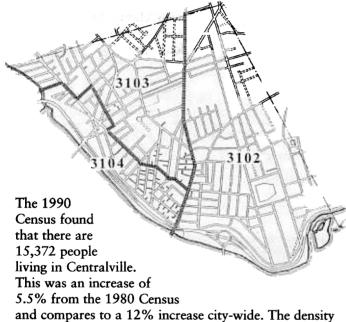
Demographics

In the 1990 Census, there were three census tracts for the Centralville Neighborhood. These were Census Tracts 3102, 3103 and 3104. A map of these census tracts follows. Although all three tracts are part of Centralville, the demographic profile between the districts is remarkably different.

1990 Population by Census Tract

the state of the s	the state of the s	
3102	6,137	
3103	5,695	
3104	3,540	
Total	15,372	

Centralville Census Tracts



of persons per household in 1990 was 3.3 while the average for the city was 2.7. In 1990, 6.8% of the Asian population and 9% of the Hispanic population lived in Centralville.

The following tables contain information on how

The following tables contain information on how the ethnic and racial percentages changed in Centralville between 1980 and 1990 by census tract. Because Hispanic ethnicity is included in more than one line, it is also included as a separate percentage on the chart.

Percentage of Ethnic - Racial Composition

	19	760	
	3102	3103	3104
White	98.7%	99%	96.2%
Black	0.2%	0.4%	1.7%
Asian	0.2%	0.4%	0.3%
Other	0.6%	0.2%	1.6%
Totals	100%	100%	100%
	0.9%		1.7%
1000			TEN 17 MAY 19 MA

Percentage of Ethnic - Racial Composition

	14	750	
- 100 Act 10 harman	3102	3103	3104
White	93%	92%	77%
Black	1%	1%	3%
Asian	3%	4%	11%
Other	3%	3%	9%
Totals	100%	100%	100%
		3%	15%
-1.7000000000000000000000000000000000000		3%	1.

The poverty rate in Centralville remains very high. In Census Tract 3102, the poverty rate actually declined between 1980 and 1990. However, in both 3103 and 3104, the rate increased. In 3103, the poverty rate almost doubled from 1980 to 1990. Census Tract 3104 has a very high rate of poverty at 25%.

Poverty Rate by Census Tract

1990	9%	11%	25%	
1980	10%	6%	23%	
	3102	3103	3104	

There are other dramatic differences between census tract 3104 and the other two tracts. For instance, in 1990, the unemployment rate in 3104 was more than double the rate in the other two tracts. 3104 also has the highest rate of linguistically isolated individuals at 7.9%, compared to 4.8% and 2.3% in 3102 and 3103. Additionally, the percentage of female householders (no spouse) with children is 50% in 3104 and only 20% in the other two tracts.

Housing & Home Ownership

he housing stock in the Centralville Neighborhood varies widely depending on the area. Close to the Merrimack River, the housing stock is predominantly multi-family structures from the 19th Century. Further to the north in Christian Hill, the housing consists mostly of single family houses from the turn of the century.

The most troubled areas of the neighborhood are the multifamily zones. These high density areas struggle with a lack of

off-street parking and usable open space. In addition, the absence of homeowners contributes to an already difficult situation.



Between 1980 and 1990, the population of Centralville increased 5.5%. During the same period, the percent of vacant housing increased from 5.1% to 7.5%.

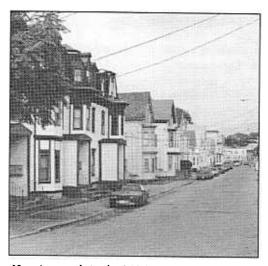
Many of the homes in the south and western areas of Centralville were built on small parcels of land. While these buildings were suitable as single family mill worker cottages, many of the buildings have since been converted to multi-family units. This results in a much denser neighborhood.

Parking

The multi-family areas, consisting of on-street parking and small lots, were not designed for the automobile. The streets are narrow and there is little room for on or off-street parking. With so many automobiles parked on the streets, maintenance is difficult, access is time-consuming and available parking spaces are limited. These problems are especially severe during the winter months.

Home Ownership

Home ownership in any neighborhood acts as a stabilizing factor. In the Centralville neighborhood, 46% of the households are owner-occupied. However, by census tract, this percentage varies widely. In Census Tract 3102, the 52.55% of the households own their home. This drops to 46.7% in 3103 and down to 33.52% in 3104.



Housing stock in the 3104 census tract

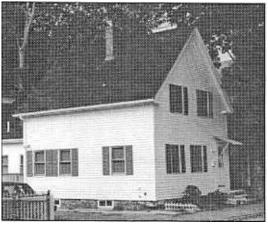
Absentee landlords are likely the biggest threat to the long term viability of the Centralville neighborhood. Landlords that do not live in the neighborhood are apt to be more concerned with profit, than a healthy neighborhood. It is likely that their properties will remain unsightly and a blight on the neighborhood.

Additional problems result from tenants. While many renters are excellent tenants that maintain their home and area very well, others do not feel such a vested interest in the neighbor-

hood. Without a sense of ownership, tenants may not provide the necessary upkeep such as keeping the property and adjacent sidewalk clean. The problem is further complicated because short term tenants are unlikely to be involved in long term neighborhood problem-solving.

Percentage of Owners and Renters by 1990 Census Tract

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The second secon	3102	3103	3104	
Owner	52.55%	46.70%	33.52%	
Renter	47.45%	53.30%	66.48%	
Totals	100%	100%	100%	

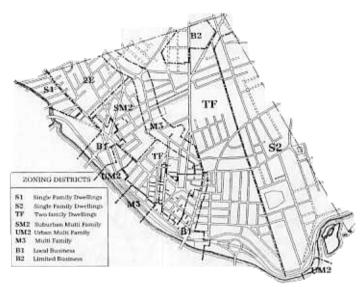


A new home owner moves into Cetralville. Home ownership is vital to the long term stability of Centralville.

Land Use & Zoning

Centralville Land Use

Centralville Zoning Districts



Land Use

The Centralville Neighborhood is predominantly a mix of single family and multi-family residential areas. Three business districts are also present. These are located at lower Bridge Street, the Aiken Street/ Lakeview intersection and at the Dracut town line on Bridge Street. Both the Lower Bridge Street and Aiken Street areas are a mix of 19th and 20th Century commercial buildings. The Sunrise Mall and other modern commercial structures are located at the Dracut town line. There are essentially no industrial uses in the Centralville Neighborhood. A color map of the land uses in Centralville can be found on the cover of this document.

Zoning

The S2 zone predominates property east of Beacon Street. Except for the three Business Zones, most of the rest of Centralville is zoned for two family or multi-family. There are no industrial zones located in Centralville.

Several problems are apparent based on a review of existing land uses and current zoning for the Centralville Neighborhood. For example, a number of non-conforming uses are present, such as business uses in residential zones. In other areas, the business zones extend into what is currently residential.

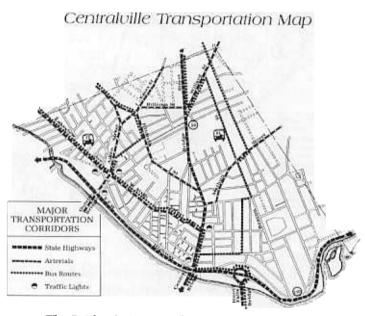
Although Centralville contains very dense neighborhoods, infill housing has been constructed in the last 10 years offsetting the gains made to reduce the density. The current multi-family zoning, which is widespread in the 3104 census tract, is not meeting the desired goal of reducing density.

Additionally, it is clear that many violations exist particularly in the business districts. These include parking areas that do not have landscape screening, parking that is too close to adjacent property and business uses that have expanded to public areas.

The residents of Centralville have also identified the boundary between residential and commercial areas as a problem. A possible solution to this problem is developing buffer zones between these two districts which would help to separate the sense of incompatibility.

Transportation

he major transportation corridors that serve the Centralville Neighborhood are Bridge Street, Aiken Street and the VFW Highway. Additionally, West Sixth Street, Hildreth Street and Methuen Street serve as collectors for the transportation system.



The Bridge Street corridor is a major thoroughfare through residential and commercial areas of Centralville. Bridge Street not only serves the residents of Centralville but also residents of the surrounding suburbs and southern New Hampshire.

The Aiken Street corridor is a major thoroughfare serving the westerly portion of the Centralville Neighborhood. Circulation will be greatly impacted by the closing of the Aiken Street Bridge for reconstruction.

Local Streets

Most of the other streets in Centralville are local streets which primarily serve the residents. Concerns include potholes, parking and narrow streets.

Parking

A recent survey found that there is adequate parking available in all the business districts. However, problems with existing customer parking are numerous. In the southern Bridge Street business district, the parking lots are small, scattered and ownership of the lots is unclear. As a result, customers may be unwilling to park at these locations. Additionally,

customers may not be willing to park at lots that are not within sight of their destination, even though the distance to walk may be very small.

With the existing densities, off street parking for Centralville residents is also a concern. Undersized lots in many cases do not afford the possibility of creating any off street parking spaces. This problem is worsened in the winter months when snow plowing and accumulation affects street widths and further limits the spaces available to residents.

Transit

The Centralville Neighborhood is served by Lowell Regional Transit Authority (LRTA) through two bus lines. These are the Number 1 - Christian Hill and Number 12 - Centralville.

Bus turnouts and defined waiting areas are not present in Centralville. The bus stop at the Sunrise Plaza is particularly hazardous because it is set within a large parking area and contains no definition. A better defined bus stop is also needed on lower Bridge Street. However, finding a suitable location that will not impact the coveted on-street parking may be difficult.

Pedestrians

Pedestrians in Centralville account for many of the trips occurring in the neighborhood. It is important to recognize the importance of transportation facilities that serve pedestrians. In addition to not needing a parking space in the business districts, pedestrians provide excellent business for the local merchants and are a vital element to a thriving commercial district.

However, the existing conditions in the business districts are particularly unfriendly to pedestrians. Crosswalks are non-existent and the numerous turning vehicles make for hazardous walking. This is true on lower Bridge Street and at the Sunrise Plaza area.

Outside of the business districts, sidewalks are often inadequate, poorly maintained and in some cases absent altogether.

Bicycles

Like pedestrians, bicyclists do not need a parking space in the business district nor do they contribute to traffic on the transportation corridors. Bicycles provide quick and inexpensive transportation for residents.

Problems for increasing bicycle usage in Centralville include maintenance, uneven road surfaces, signalization, poor access to Merrimac River Walkway and a lack of bicycle parking facilities.

Open Space & Recreation

lack of open space continues to be a major challenge to the denser neighborhoods of Centralville. However, overall Centralville does contain a wide variety of recreational facilities. Over the past five to six years, Lowell has invested approximately \$700,000 in open space and recreation

Community Spaces



facilities in Centralville. Yet, additional improvements are needed.

In 1994, the City of Lowell completed an Open Space and Recreation Plan. This report found that the Neighborhood of Centralville contained approximately 51.75 Acres of recreational land in the following parks:

Open Space in Centralville by Acreage

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Christian Hill Reservoir	14.96
First Street Playground	1.48
Gage Field	8.10
Hovey Field	8.54
McPhearson Playground	8.57
Msgr. Keenan Playground	0.30
St. Louis Playground	9.30
Varnum Park	0.50
Total Acres	



McPherson Playground

These parks contain the following facilities:

Recreational Facilities in Centralville

Little League Baseball Diamonds	2
	2
Baseball Diamonds	2
Softball Diamonds (1 Lighted)	5
Football/Soccer Fields	2
Basketball Courts	5
Tennis Courts (3 Lighted)	8
Volleyball Court (1 Lighted)	1
Swimming Pool/Wading Pool	1
Tot Areas	6
Picnic Area	1
Play Area	1
Sets of Stands	2
Benches	43

According to the Plan, Centralville is in need of an additional 40 to 100 Acres of recreational land based on its population of 15,732 people.

However, the greatest need for open space is in the dense neighborhoods of lower Bridge Street and Lakeview Avenue. While the existing parks are a wonderful asset to the residents of Centralville, the busy streets and traffic prevent many children from using them.



Community Life

ith 15,372 people calling Centralville home today, creating a safe, satisfying and comfortable environment for all residents and visitors is the highest priority of this Neighborhood Plan.

There are presently two active neighborhood groups in Centralville. The Centralville Neighborhood Action Group (CNAG) and the Centralville Neighborhood Partnership (CNP). These organizations provide a vital link to improving the quality of life in Centralville.

Centralville Neighborhood Action Group (CNAG)

The Centralville Neighborhood Action Group is focused on improving the quality of life in the 3104 (and portions of 3103) census tract. Priority projects for CNAG are increasing owner occupied housing, educating and fostering partnerships with absentee landlords, increasing off street parking and open space, developing reuse alternatives for the vacant lots and abandoned buildings and generally improving the quality of life by empowering residents to take back their neighborhood.



A Centralville neighborohood meeting.

Centralville Neighborhood Partnership (CNP)

The Centralville Neighborhood Partnership (CNP) is a recently incorporated community development corporation. The CNP mission is to improve the quality of life throughout Centralville. Priority projects for CNP are the redevelopment of 401 Bridge Street, improving recreational facilities and developing reuse options for the 10th Street School and the 4th Street Firehouse.

Public Safety

With a new neighborhood police precinct and the Centralville Neighborhood Action Group Crime Watch, the Centralville neighborhood has been very successful in reducing crime. Yet, further improvements to crime reduction and image are needed.

Business Districts

he Centralville Neighborhood contains three business districts. These are Lower Bridge Street, Sunrise Plaza and the Aiken Street area. Both Bridge Street and Aiken Street are a mix of 19th Century and 20th Century commercial buildings. The Sunrise Plaza was constructed in the mid 20th Century. All three areas are in need of improvements.

Lower Bridge Street

The Lower Bridge Street commercial area contains 19th and 20th Century buildings. The older buildings are typically set close to the street with business uses on the first floor and residences above. Many of these buildings are in need of rehabilitation. In-fill newer buildings are usually only one story masonry structures.

Lower Bridge Street has great potential to increase its market share due to the density of the adjacent neighborhoods, its location on an arterial route and its affordable, yet close proximity to downtown. One building, in particular, is important to this effort.

401 Bridge Street is a large Queen Anne structure situated at the corner of Bridge Street and Third Street. This building is currently vacant with acquisition and redevelopment plans underway.

Parking is a major problem on lower Bridge Street. Although a recent survey found that there is adequate parking available, the parking lots themselves are scattered and private. Additionally, customers may not be willing to park at lots that are not within sight of their destination, even though the distance to walk may be very small.

Although on-street parking is allowed here, the 15 minute parking limit greatly reduces customers interested in staying longer or using services.



Lower Bridge Street business area

Aiken Street

The Aiken Street business district is in need of major revitalization. The buildings are not well-kept, businesses are scattered and there is little incentive to shop here. Two large, unoccupied residential buildings are located here which contribute to the blighted condition.



Aiken Street business area

Sunrise Plaza

Sunrise Plaza located at the other end of Bridge Street, adjacent to the Dracut border is typical of a 20th Century regional shopping plaza. There is expansive parking located in front of the large one story masonry building. Two large anchor stores and several smaller businesses are located here. Located directly across Bridge Street from the Sunrise Plaza are several other businesses.



Sunrise Plaza

A major concern of this area is the hazardous conditions resulting from a lack of any curbcuts at the Sunrise Plaza. There are no defined entrances and exits here. With the level of traffic on Bridge Street and the many commercial driveways across the street, potential accident points are very high.

Additionally, pedestrians are not accommodated for in this location. There are no crosswalks and sidewalks are inadequate. The LRTA bus stop is located within the parking lot which provides no safety zone for transit users.

Additional pedestrians could utilize this shopping area since there are many apartment buildings set behind the businesses. However, the area must become more pedestrian friendly first.

Lastly, this area contains no landscaping or softening of the large expanses of asphalt.

Historic Preservation

The Centralville Neighborhood contains an excellent collection of historic resources. This includes the many Italianate cottages, Second Empire and Queen Anne structures found throughout Centralville. In addition, Centralville contains several fine commercial buildings dating from the late 19th Century. An extensive survey of the historic resources in Centralville was completed in 1981.

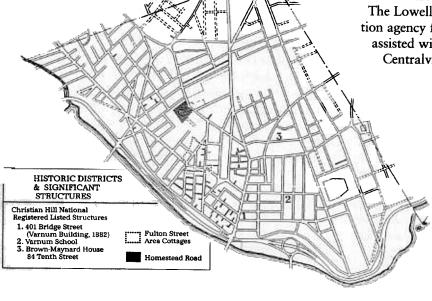
Historic Districts

In 1994, the Lowell Historic Board, through a consultant, completed an update to the survey of historic resources in Centralville. The report found many concerns regarding the loss of historic integrity in Centralville. This included inappropriate exterior applications, removal of historical building detail and demolition.

Although the historic character of Centralville is very unique, there are many challenges to increasing preservation in Centralville. These include absentee landlords, lack of funding and the higher costs of restoration versus rehabilitation.

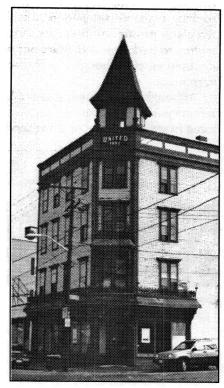
Lowell Historic Board

The Lowell Historic Board is the historic preservation agency for the city of Lowell. The LHB has assisted with several restoration projects in the Centralville neighborhood such as 697 Bridge St.





697 Bridge Street



401 Bridge Street

Recommendations

Housing and Homeownership

- Conduct a building condition survey of all properties.
- Develop a Vacant Buildings Database.
- Develop a method of monitoring the progress of vacant buildings.
- Develop a recommendation for the reuse of each vacant or abandoned building.
- · Rehabilitate appropriate vacant or abandoned buildings.
- Demolish vacant or abandoned buildings that are not suitable for rehabilitation.
- Encourage buildings to be owner-occupied.
- Develop a method of fostering communication between absentee landlords, tenants and the city.

Land Use and Zoning

- Conduct an in depth review of the zoning districts in the 3104 and 3103 census tracts. Based on this review recommend zoning changes that would improve the quality of life in the neighborhood.
- Encourage reducing the density of buildings in appropriate areas by selected demolition and changing appropriate multi-family zones to two family or one family zones.
- Encourage rehabilitation that will reduce the number of units in multi-family buildings, where appropriate.
- Review the process for granting special permits and variances.
- Enforce the buffer zone landscaping and alternative screening requirements.
- Identify areas that could be used for buffer zones between the residential and commercial areas.
- Develop a vacant lots program.
- Develop a reuse recommendation on each of the vacant lots.
- Develop a Yard Sale program in which small, unbuildable vacant lots acquired by the city through tax title foreclsure can be sold to abutters for additional yard space or off street parking.

Transportation

- Consider the feasibility of an improved bus stop in the vicinity of 401 Bridge Street.
- Redesign the bus stop at the Sunrise Plaza to be more safe and comfortable.
- Install proper sidewalk crossings at all intersections on lower Bridge Street including crosswalk installation with appropriate pedestrian signage.
- Install bicycle racks on lower Bridge Street.
- · Maintain painted markings on all roadways.
- Install pedestrian signalization at hazardous intersections.
- Install improved sidewalks along the whole commercial corridor on upper Bridge Street
- Define the driveway entrances at Sunrise Plaza.
- Improve the Sunrise Plaza boundary through defined driveway entrances, landscaping and sidewalks.
- Work with the Massachusetts Highway Department to complete signal installation at the Bridge, Willard and Billings Street intersection.
- Conduct a sidewalk survey and develop a sidewalk plan for improvements including handicapped accessibility.
- Develop a paving plan for Centralville with input from the neighborhood groups, Department of Planning and Development, Engineering Department and the City Council.
- Coordinate the closing of the Aiken Street Bridge with other departments and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to lessen the impact on Centralville residents.

Maintain the existing sidewalks throughout Centralville.

Open Space and Recreation

- Remove Tennis Courts at First Street Playground and plant trees or shrubs.
- Plant additional trees at First Street Playground and make other appropriate improvements.

Recommendations (continued)

Open Space and Recreation

- Create a gateway at Bridge Street to the Merrimack River Walkway.
- Survey all vacant lots as part of the Vacant Lots
 Program and identify potential parcels for neighborhood
 play areas.
- Create partnerships for the maintenance of local playgrounds.
- Develop a method of maintaining the Merrimack River Walkway.
- Maintain the existing parks and recreational facilities.

Community Life

- Provide technical assistance to the neighborhood groups.
- Provide community outreach and education on city resources and assistance.
- Assist the neighborhood groups in obtaining additional grants.
- Continue to work with the Lowell Police Department on crime reduction and neighborhood image.

Business Districts

- Encourage business owners to park their own vehicles off Bridge Street which would provide additional on street parking for shoppers.
- Beautify public parking areas with screening, landscaping and defined curbcuts.
- Maintain painted markings on all roadways.
- · Maintain planters.
- Encourage the placement of window boxes on storefronts where possible.
- Work with CNP and CNAG to increase the business climate on Lower Bridge Street.
- Work with CNAG to increase the business climate on Aiken/Lakeview Avenues.
- Determine feasibility of increased pedestrian connections between Sunrise Plaza and nearby apartment buildings.

 Develop methods of improving facades on lower Bridge Street and Aiken Street.

Develop a streetscape program to target Bridge Street and Aiken Street that would include landscaping, trash receptacles, signage and other improvements.

Install a Welcome to Centralville Sign on lower Bridge Street, Aiken Avenue and at the Dracut border.

- Redevelop 401 Bridge Street.
- Construct sidewalks on both sides of Upper Bridge Street at the Sunrise Plaza.
- Evaluate the transition areas between businesses and residential zoning. Develop specific recommendations on rezoning and improved buffer zones between the two zones.

Historic Preservation

- Nominate the Massachusetts Homestead Commission houses on Homestead Road to the National Register of Historic Places.
- Nominate the individually eligible structures of Centralville to the National Register of Historic Places.
- Nominate the Fulton Street Area Cottages in West Centralville to the National Register of Historic Places.
- Educate property owners through the Lowell Historic Board about maintaining the historic character of their building, researching the history of their building and on obtaining an historic plaque. This can be done through workshops and brochures.
- Implement design guidelines through the Lowell Historic Board for facade and signage improvements.
- Develop educational curriculum in the schools that would focus on the history of Centralville.
- Expand the historical markers on buildings in Centralville.
- Search for additional funding for historic preservation in Centralville.
- Explore the historic value of the Hildreth family cemetery.